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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Saint Mary's River Treated with 230 Tons of Limestone Sand

Augusta County – The USDA Forest Service and several partners applied high calcium limestone sand to the upper portion of the Saint Mary's River and its tributaries in an effort to mitigate acid deposition. Water washing over limestone sand will return the river and several headwater streams to normal pH levels, sustaining the natural ecosystem that many fish and insect species require to survive. This project protects 12 miles of stream water from the harmful effects of acid rain.

The project site resides in the congressionally designated Saint Mary's Wilderness, which presents a very unique challenge: no road access is available. To meet this challenge, limestone sand was loaded into a cement bucket one ton at a time at a site outside of the Wilderness. The limestone was transported by medium-lift helicopter and applied directly into each stream channel. A total of 230 tons of limestone was delivered to seven locations within the Saint Mary's Wilderness over a four day period.

The application of high calcium limestone sand will neutralize the water's acidity for several years. This protects against the continued loss of aquatic habitat which threatens the stability of the Saint Mary's River. This project is similar to previous limings conducted in 1999 and 2005, and is part of ongoing efforts to protect sensitive cold-water streams and aquatic ecosystems.

Saint Mary's River and Saint Mary's Wilderness are located in Augusta County, Virginia, on the western slope of the Blue Ridge Mountains, approximately 10 miles south of Staunton, Virginia. At 9,835 acres, the Saint Mary's Wilderness is the second largest Wilderness on the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, and was designated by Congress in 1984. The upper portion of Saint Mary's River is recognized throughout the state for its sparking cascades and superb trout fishery.

Several partners contributed to the success of this project including: Dominion Power Company, Skylark Farms, the Blue Ridge Parkway, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, James Madison University, and Trout Unlimited. For additional information on the Saint Mary's Liming Project, contact Forest Fisheries Biologist Dawn Kirk at (540) 291-2188.

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The mission of the USDA Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.